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An Essay.

1827

W. E. H.

On

Typhus Fever

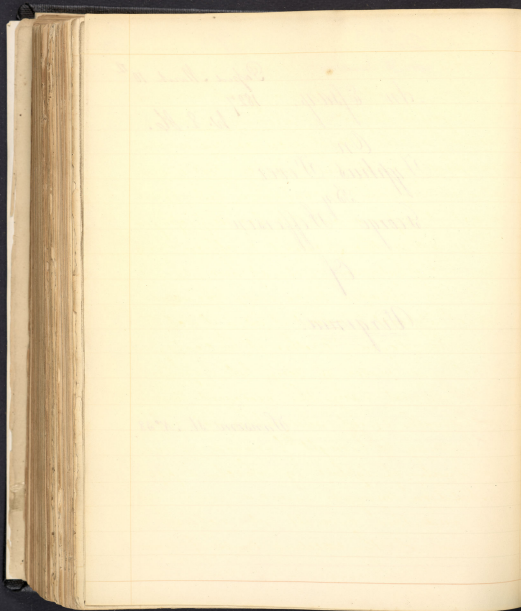
By

George Stefferson

Of

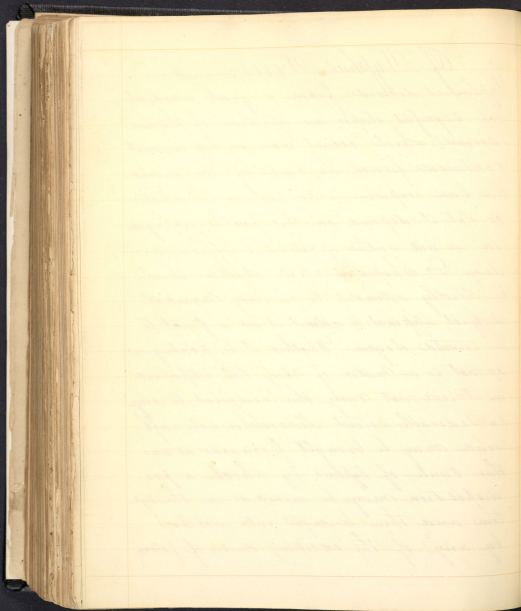
Virginia.

Sansom St. N<sup>o</sup> 38



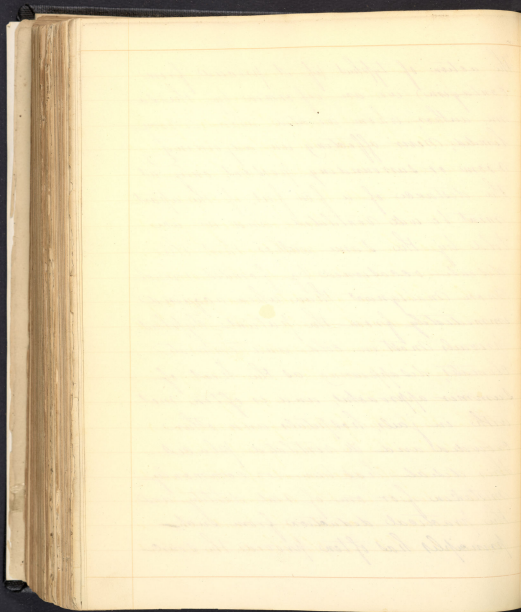
## Of Typhus Fever.

Typhus is derived from a Greek word, which signifies stupor, an affection of the sensorium, which occurs more or less in most continued fevers. The cause of this disease has been imputed to contagion, but whether or not it depend on this for its propagation, we will neither pretend to affirm nor deny. Dr. Chapman, whose opinion should be strictly attended to on every medical subject, appears to admit it as a fact to a limited degree. Whether it be contagious or not is a matter of very little importance as it will not vary the treatment to any considerable extent. Atmospheric influence may be brought forward as another cause of typhus, by which a predisposition may be induced in the system, and then brought into action by any of the exciting causes of fever.





(27)  
The action of typhus (if it proceed from contagion) we are informed by the same author, whom we cited above, is very limited; never affecting an adjoining room or surrounding persons, only at the distance of a few feet, if the apartment be well ventilated; and we are told by the same author that the disease occasioned by fomites is much more malignant than when acquired immediately from the patient. Typhus prevails most in cold and temperate climates, disappearing as the heat of summer approaches, and is often met with in jails, hospitals, and other crowded and ill ventilated places. This disease has been too commonly mistaken for one of real debility and the practical deduction from such principles has often proved the source

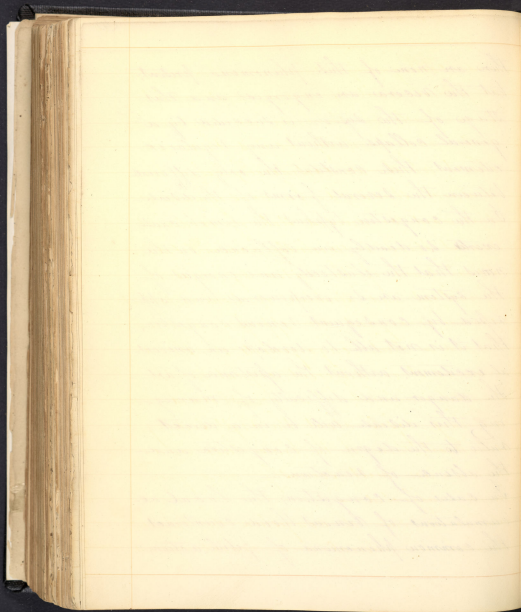


of the failure and apparent inefficacy of the healing art: whilst the inexperienced practitioner pours down stimulants upon stimulants to raise the system from that debility, which he conceives it labouring under, he finds that life recedes apace and at last he abandons every effort, and has the sad mortification to see his fellow being sink into the arms of death, which an opposite and well regulated treatment would have prevented. Doctor Armstrong divides typhus into its simple, inflammatory and congestive forms, but it is principally to the latter, that the following observations are applicable. In the first there is only a simple excitement of the heart and arteries: in the second there is an universal increase of heat and excitement; while in the third and last

There

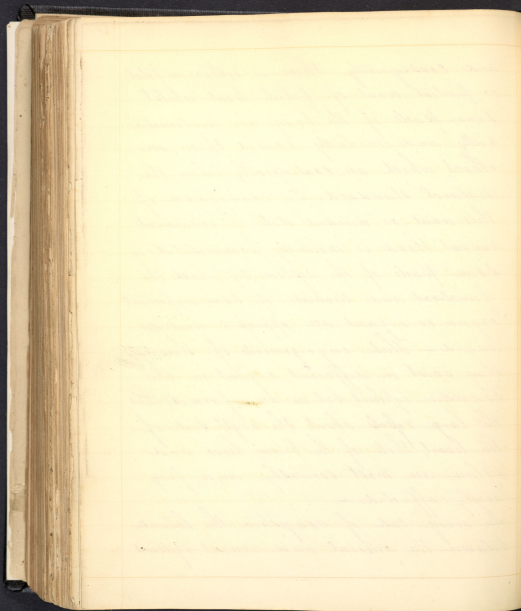
there are none of these phenomena present; but the viscera are engorged and this stage of the system is succeeded by a general collapse without any regular excitement: these constitute the only difference between the several forms of the disease. In the congestion typhus the remote cause exerts so deadly an influence on the nerves that the elasticity and energies of the system are so overpowered and oppressed by consequent venous congestion, that it is not able to develop an universal excitement without the assistance of art. The danger and difficulty of managing this disease will be in a direct ratio to the degree of congestion and the absence of reaction.

In cases of congestion the local accumulations of venous blood counteract the common phenomena of febrile action,



and consequently there is either a total, or partial want of febrile heat. whilst some parts of the body are preternaturally and morbidly excited, there are others, which are considerably below the natural standard. In consequence of this want or divided state of excitement, venous blood is morbidly accumulated in some parts of the system, by which the functions and structure of some important organ or organs are oppressed and deranged. Such engorgements of blood may exist in different organs in the congestive typhus, but we are informed that the large vessels about the right side of the heart, those of the brain, liver and spleen are most seriously and frequently affected.

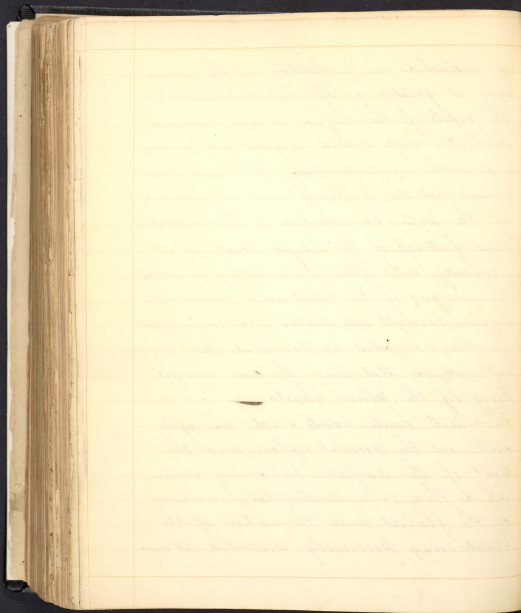
In every case of congestion the balance between the arterial and venous systems





is disturbed in proportion as the congestion is greater or less. The circulation in the vessels of the surface is very languid, while the deep seated organs are engorged with a superfluity of blood, and may not the fullness and oppression of the pulse be ascribed to the distension and fullness of the larger veins, as it generally rises after blood letting, by which the energies of the heart and arteries are again brought into action: not unfrequently "a congested is converted into an inflammatory state, and the cure is sailing by the plain chart" —

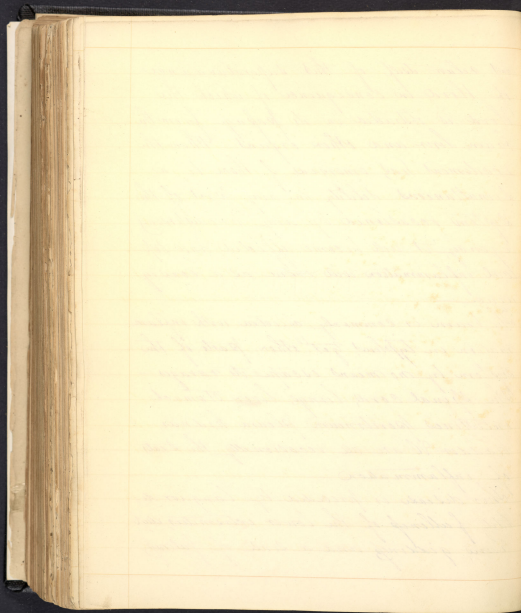
The remote cause exerts such an influence on the nervous system and the heat of the surface becoming diminished, there is a centripetal tendency of the fluids, and the action of the heart being previously disturbed it can



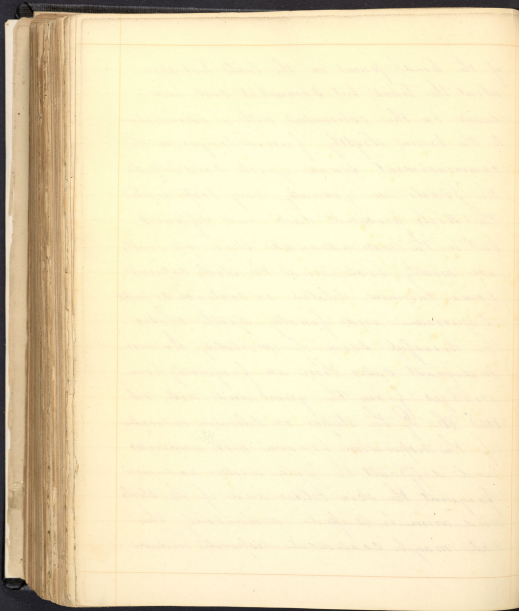
not relax itself of this superabundance  
of blood, in consequence of which the  
blood is obstructed in its passage from the  
brain, liver and other organs. When the  
excrement has emerged, if there be a  
simultaneous debility in any part of the  
system occasioned by any predisposing  
agency, it will become affected, and topi-  
cal inflammation will ensue as a conse-  
quence.

The brain is commonly affected with inflam-  
mation in typhus, yet other parts of the  
system by no means escape its ravages—  
The spinal cord, lungs, liver, stomach,  
intestines, peritonaeum, pleura, kidneys,  
bladder &c. are all occasionally the seats  
of inflammation—

This disease is preceded by languor, de-  
bility, fullness of the lower extremities, dis-  
pense, giddiness and a sense of fulness

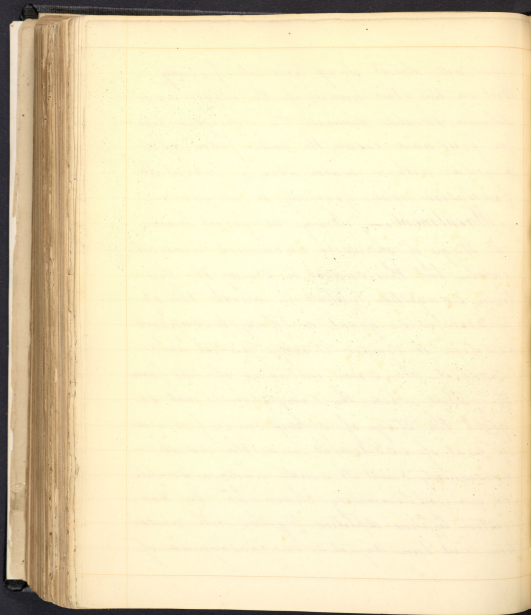


of the head, pains in the limbs, hot skin  
about the trunk, but somewhat cool and  
damp on the extremities, with a determination  
to the brain, slightly furrowed tongue in the  
commencement, small quick corded pulse,  
the bowels are generally very torpid and  
the stools procured dark and deficient,  
but in the more advanced stage the bowels  
are mostly loose and the stools copious:  
coma, delirium, delatid or contracted pupils  
supervene and finally death closes  
the dreadful scene of mortality. In more  
malignant cases, there are frequently hem-  
orrhages from the gums and nose, rit-  
ices &c. If the stupor or delirium increase,  
if the respiration become more anxious  
and difficult, the pulse weaker and more  
frequent, the skin colder and if the stools  
and urine be passed involuntarily, the  
case may be considered desperate indeed



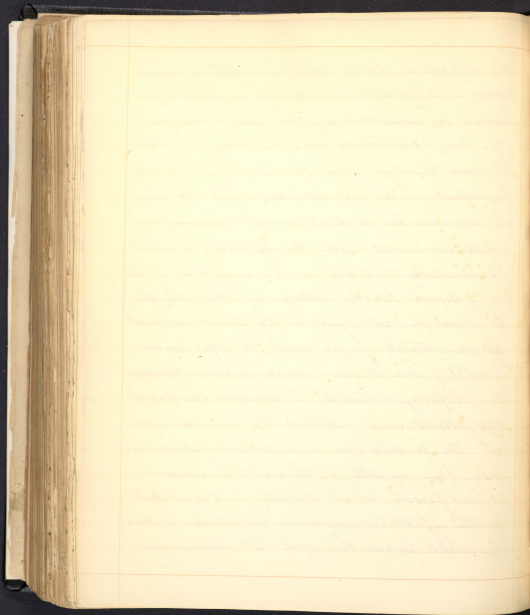
and will almost always terminate fatally. But on the other hand, if the stupor and delirium should diminish, the respiration become freer and easier, the pulse fuller and regular with a warm skin, a favourable conclusion may generally be drawn —

Treatment. — Nearly all fevers have a stage of oppression, excitement and collapse, but this cannot be said of the truly congestive typhus, in which the oppression is so great as totally to suppress reaction or render it very partial and imperfect. In some instances of this form of typhus, when the congestion is not so great, the stage of oppression is followed by that of excitement, and the disease subsequently runs its course under a simple or an inflammatory character. In congestive typhus depletion together with unsedation had been rejected in consequence of

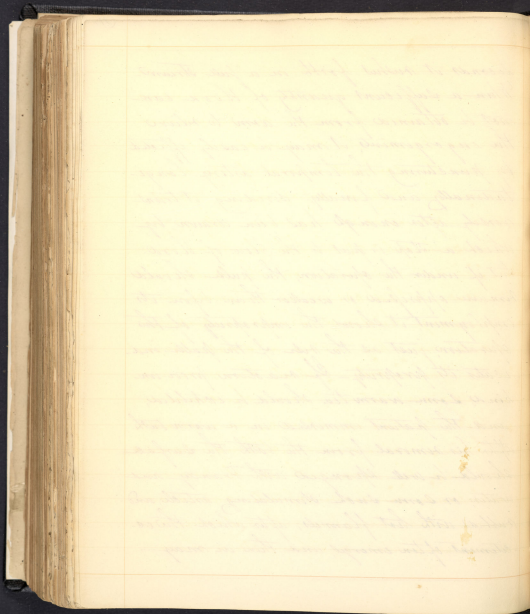




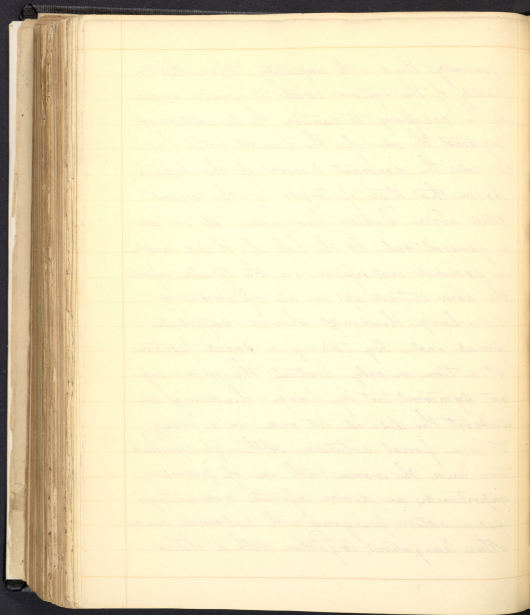
the supposed debility and exhaustion, which  
ever has precipitated many a patient into  
eternity by undermining the latent energies  
of his constitution and severing the fragile  
thread of life, and this too by that very  
treatment, which was intended for his relief.  
No one in the present enlightened age of  
medicine will have the affrontery to doubt  
the propriety, necessity and beneficial effects  
of general blood-letting in this disease.  
It must be employed in the commencement  
of an attack, if we wish to experience  
benefit from its use, and where the case  
is properly selected, it removes the local  
congestions, and restores the equilibrium  
of the circulation in a wonderful man-  
ner. The quantity of blood to be drawn  
is indefinite, but it should be regulated  
by the effects produced. Sometimes it may  
be drawn from the arm, but after a few



seconds it rushes forth in a full stream. When a sufficient quantity of blood cannot be obtained from the arm to relieve the engorgement, it may be easily effected by puncturing the temporal artery longitudinally and finally dividing it transversely after enough has been drawn, by which a stop is put to the flow of blood: but if under the operation, the pulse should remain oppressed or weaker than before its employment, it shows the impropriety of the operation, just as the rise of the pulse indicates its propriety. If reaction prove unkind, some warm tea should be exhibited, and the patient immersed in a warm bath. After his removal from the bath the surface should be well sponged with <sup>warm</sup> brandy and water, or some such stimulating article, and rubbed with hot flannels; after which the excitement often emerges, and then we may



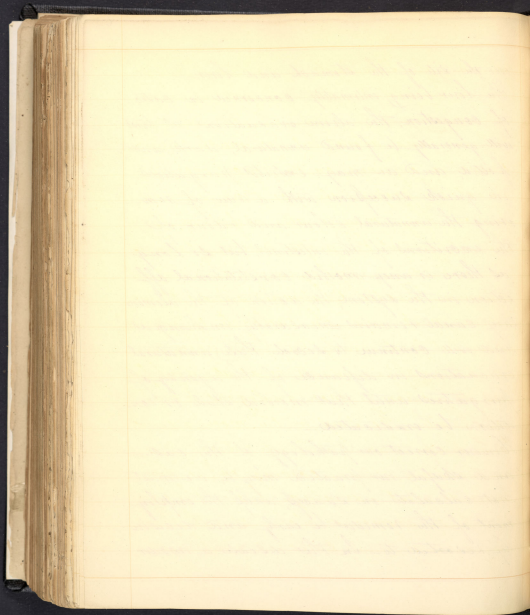
generally. Has with impunity. When this tor-  
pidity of the system exists, it would scarcely  
be necessary to caution the practitioner  
against the use of the lancet until he  
arouses the dormant powers of the system  
from that state of torpor by the means  
cited above. Doctor Chapman tells us as  
a general rule, let the loss of blood make  
a decided impression on the pulse before  
the arm is tied up: in all inflammatory  
cases large bleedings should supersede  
small ones. By taking a small portion  
at a time, we only palliate the more arg-  
-ent symptoms, but by large bleedings we  
subvert the disease at once and bring  
it to a final solution. Although venese-  
ction and the warm bath are of primary  
importance, we derive infinite advantage  
from active purging with calomel and  
other purgatives, together with a blister



over the site of the stomach and liver—

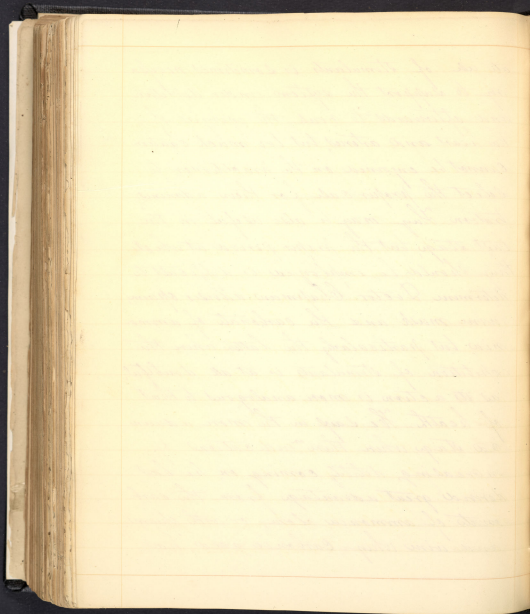
The liver being intimately concerned in cases of congestion, the alvine evacuations at first will generally be found unnatural, dark and fetid, and we may exhibit purgatives in quick succession with a view of removing the unnatural colour and odour of the excretions of the intestines, but so long as there is any morbid constitutional affection in the system, the action of the alimentary canal remains measurably unchanged and will continue to secrete these unnatural evacuations in defiance of the agency of purgatives until that morbid state or condition be eradicated—

However correct our pathology of the case and skilful our practice may be we must not calculate on success, unless the employment of the remedies be early and decisively resorted to. In this disease a moder-



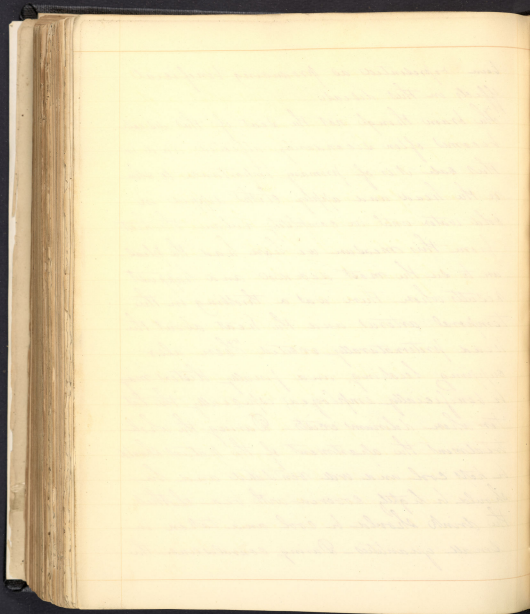


ate use of stimulants is sometimes necessary to support the system under depletion, and afterwards to rouse the energies of the heart and arteries, but too much caution cannot be enjoined on the practitioner to select the proper case for their administration. They may be also useful in the last stage, but the proper period at which they should be employed is difficult to determine. Doctor Chapman advises opium, wine, musk and the carbonate of ammonia, but particularly the latter when the exhibition of stimulants is at all doubtful, as its action is more analogous to that of heat. He says in the more advanced stage when there are indications of increasing vitality coming on, he has derived great advantage from the carbonate of ammonia alone, or with opium and wine. Whig Carbonic acid has



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been represented as producing beneficial effects in this disease.

The brain though not the seat of this disease becomes often secondarily affected, and in this case it is of primary importance to shaven the head and apply cloths dipped in cold water until we completely subdue the heat. From this measure we have had the pleasure to see the most decided and happiest results when there was a throbbing in the temporal arteries, and the heat about the head preternaturally excited. Here also cupping, leeching, and finally blisters may be beneficially employed, especially the latter when delirium exists. During the whole treatment the apartment of the patient should be kept cool and well ventilated and he should be lightly covered with bed clothes. The drink should be cool and taken in small quantities. During convalescence the



diet should be strictly regulated. The patient should be allowed nothing but what is of a mild nature, such as the farinaceous articles, gruel &c. and these in small quantities occasionally repeated, as errors in diet or a full meal will very often produce a secondary fever. The bowels should be kept soluble until health has returned. The employment of stimulants and tonics during convalescence, we are informed is generally decidedly hurtful and should be abandoned in most cases as highly prejudicial. The use of peruvian bark is favourably spoken of by Doctor Chapman in one stage of typhus. He says "There is a period however in the progress of the fever, to be learnt by attention to the pulse and other circumstances at which bark may be introduced with advantage. It is neither at the commencement nor at the close of the case."

Geo. Jefferson  
Esq.

